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SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EUR/CARC

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/22/2019

TAGS: PGOV PREL RU GG
SUBJECT: GEORGIA: EXPLOSIONS DAMAGE TWO EUMM VEHICLES;
GEORGIAN AMBULANCE DRIVER KILLED

Classified By: Ambassador John F. Tefft for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) On June 21st at approximately 1105 am, explosions damaged an EUMM armored patrol vehicle and accompanying private ambulance near Eristskali, located west of the Enguri River near the Abkhazian administrative boundary line in undisputed Georgian territory. The Georgian ambulance driver died of his injuries in the hospital following the incident, and according to press reports, a medic in the ambulance was also injured. EUMM and the Georgian Ministry of the Interior (MOIA) are investigating the incident.

¶2. (SBU) An EUMM security official in Gori told local officials with HALO Trust, a demining organization working in the Gori region and Abkhazia, that two explosions occurred on June 21. The first came as an EUMM patrol convoy, consisting of an armored EUMM patrol vehicle, a Mediclub ambulance and a third vehicle, was approximately 1.5 km from the administrative boundary line in between Russian and Georgian checkpoints (.5 km from the Georgian checkpoint) returning towards undisputed Georgian territory. The EUMM official said that an explosive device detonated between the lead EUMM vehicle and the ambulance directly behind it. Personnel in the lead patrol vehicle and the ambulance exited the vehicles to survey the damage and transfer the personnel in the ambulance to the armored vehicle. About 15 seconds later, while the personnel were outside the vehicles and the vehicles were stationary, the second explosion occurred. Based on this information, HALO Trust sources speculated that this was a targeted attack, with the first device likely set up as a trip wire and the second device probably timer or remote controlled.

¶3. (U) In a June 22 statement, the head of the EUMM, Hansjorg Haber, expressed his concern that the attack was deliberate. Regarding the attack, he said "this is a worrying development and completely unacceptable. The EUMM is an unarmed non executive Mission, mandated to carry out patrols to bring about security and stability to the people on both sides of the administrative boundary lines."

¶4. (C) The timing of this attack, following the Russian veto of the UNOMIG mandate and one week before OSCE monitoring operations cease, is concerning. EUMM remains as the last international monitoring presence in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and this incident highlights the need for a continuing, robust presence to fill the gaps left by OSCE and UNOMIG. The attack suggests that some side(s) may want to dissuade the EUMM from continuing its monitoring efforts and again provides evidence of the need for cooperation between the sides on the Incident Prevention Response Mechanism.

TEFFT